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were fair. You now say a "technical trick" was used against you. Is Nawaz Sharif's statement good for the PML(N)'s other electoral defeats?

Things take time to surface. In due course many individuals have found traces of technical-rigging.

Don't you think this nation is getting sick and tired of these cries of "foul play" by the loser? This is why I did not file an election petition. I did not want people to say what you have just said.

Were 1990's elections fair?

If you go by statistics you will find the voting patterns pretty much the same in 1990 and 1993's elections.

What does General Beg mean when he says funds from Mehran Bank were used in 1990's elections?

(Laughs) Well he did not pay us a penny. Let us ask him where he used these funds.

Are you being victimized by the government?

They don't know how resilient we are. Mr. Bhutto nationalized all our assets and took all our lands. I was jailed with drug addicts and deprived of even basic hygienic facilities. I told Benazir once that she was always imprisoned in comfortable guest houses whereas her father kept me in sub-human conditions.

They have just tried the "character assassination" trick, with the Mehran bank scandal. That has failed. Our bank ceilings have been blocked to strangle us financially to turn us into "loan defaulters". I challenge them to publish the names of people who got loans of over Rs.2 billion written off in the last ten years. You will neither find the Sharif's nor the Chaudhrys in that list.

Did your family have a hand in the infamous cooperatives scandal?

I have written to President Leghari and the prime minister that their men owe crores of rupees to the cooperatives. This must be returned to pay off depositors. And yes, we have done business with the cooperatives, but so has President Leghari. He had sold his Gulberg house through a cooperative society. Many others have done so too.

When our credit lines were stopped by the government, we had no choice but to take loans from the cooperatives. Nawaz Sharif's family also had to do this. But all of this was paid back to the cooperatives with 20% interest and these funds were released to the depositors.

Let us not forget that the Loan Commission consisting of three judges has cleared us. Hats off to Nawaz Sharif for having set up this commission while he was prime minister. PPP law experts Aitzaz Ahsan, Salman Taseer and Khawaja Tariq Rahim tried their best to implicate us.

Look at the contrast now. The commission formed for the Mehran Bank scandal cannot call in the president.

Would you accept the commission's verdict, if the president appears before it?

No! We object to its vague reference terms. They have brought in Habib Bank Limited and other matters to confuse the real issue. I fear the chances of the government getting into trouble seem far greater than the president's. With the kind of evidence with the commission the Frontier government is certainly going to be in a soup!

Why was Ch. Pervaiz Elahi overlooked and Ghulam Haider Wyne made chief minister of Punjab in 1990?

Pervaiz Elahi consented to the decision.

Was that decision right?

(Smiles) Ghulam Haider Wyne is dead. What can I say now?

If that decision was correct and unanimous why did you make Ch. Pervaiz Elahi PML(N)'s candidate against Mr Wattoo during the fateful '93 Punjab assembly crisis?

The MPAs had gone against Mr Wyne just to save the assembly. President Ishaq threatened to dissolve the Punjab Assembly otherwise.

Political observers say you are a classic "political number two". You enjoy the same privileges and power as those of a "number one" but are spared the criticism number ones get in Pakistani politics! Is this by design?

(Laughs) Who says the number two is ever spared. I am always in the line of fire. In fact, to shield the "Number One" we even take his share of "fire".

"Train Marches" and "Long Marches" are happening a little too often. People want peace and stability. How will this be possible if PML(N) agitates against the PPP and vice versa?

I have said this system is not working. The government could have avoided this. They have to take the first step. They should have taken the leader of the Opposition's consent on key points. They are installing their people everywhere. Even judges and governors. Now they are

waiting for a suitable person to retire and fill the chief election commissioner's slot too. How can this system work under these circumstances?

But that does not answer my question? Let us face realities. PPP and PML(N) both poll about 36% to 38% votes and therefore are quite evenly poised. Where is the guarantee that in a new system an Opposition will let a government complete its term?

That is precisely what we want. A system in which this confrontation does not take place. But Benazir started this. She did not let us complete our term.

But you did the same to her in 1990. Where does this end?

We did not dismiss her. Her own president (Ghulam Ishaq) did this to her. The same man brought her back too. It was a case of personal likes and dislikes.

You are a national leader. How do you look at the Sindh problem?

Law and order is Sindh's main problem. When in government we were able to tackle this but the PPP has failed to sort this out. When I was interior minister we got the situation analyzed professionally. We took two months to look at various aspects of the problem. The bottom line is that all governments including martial law regimes failed to sort the matter out due to political considerations.

The Waderas etc were political threats to the federal and Sindh governments. We decided to tackle the case on merit. The MQM was our ally. Despite this, we gave them a list of their members involved in crimes to hand them over to the government but they did not accept our request. Our next step was to issue a one page notification to the Army, giving it a free hand to purge Sindh of the miscreants and peace returned to Sindh.

This government is supporting criminals on political considerations. Nawaz Sharif was the first prime minister to make Sindh feel secure. He went deep into the interior to the very poor and talked to them. He was the first to have distributed so much land to the landless.

During the Army operation cases had been registered against Altaf Hussain. Do you support the idea that he should face these cases in court?

Yes, why not! If Murtaza Bhutto can face charges why shouldn't Altaf Hussain?

This interview was held before the PML(N)'s Train March